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President Sees A Soviet 'Ploy' In 3 Defections

Says Yurchenko Was of Little Value to C.I.A.

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 6 — President Reagan said today that the Yurchenko affair, along with two other recent incidents involving Soviet citizens, might constitute a "deliberate ploy" to disrupt his coming meeting with Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

Mr. Reagan said Vitaly Yurchenko, a K.G.B. officer who had been described by officials as a prized defector, had proven to be of little value. The assessment contradicted assertions by officials and by members of Congress who had been briefed about Mr. Yurchenko by the Central Intelligence Agency.

"The information that he provided was not anything new or sensational," Mr. Reagan told a group of news agency reporters. "It was pretty much information already known to the C.I.A."

President Voices Suspicion

In voicing suspicion that recent incidents might have been staged, Mr. Reagan also mentioned the case of a Soviet soldier who sought refuge in the United States Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, and that of a seaman aboard the Soviet cargo ship Marshal Konev in the Mississippi River. Both made apparent moves to defect, then reversed themselves.

"I have to say that, coming as they do together, these three particular incidents," Mr. Reagan said, "you can't rule out the possibility that this might have been a deliberate ploy, a maneuver. We just have to live with it because there is no way we can prove or disprove it."

This afternoon, Mr. Yurchenko boarded an Aeroflot airliner bound for the Soviet Union. He walked out to the plane surrounded by Soviet diplomats, two of whom carried bouquets of red roses.

Mr. Yurchenko bounded up the stairs of the jet, and waved to reporters standing nearby. Although Aeroflot has lost its landing rights in the United States for regular passenger service, Soviet diplomats here are permitted to make use of special flights to and from Moscow.

In a written statement made public later by the Soviet Embassy, Mr. Yurchenko reiterated his charges, made at a news conference Monday, that he had been kidnapped by American intelligence services.

"Today is a happy day for me," the statement said. "My forced stay in the United States is coming to an end."

The State Department has said that he had been a willing defector who then assisted the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the C.I.A.

Officials and a physician from the State Department met with Mr. Yurchenko on Tuesday and concluded that his decision to return home had not been coerced. The State Department made a similar determination about the seaman in the Mississippi River, Miroslav Medved, and the soldier, Pvt. Aleksandr V. Sukhanov.

Unanswered Questions Remain

Mr. Yurchenko leaves behind a host of unanswered questions.

A spokesman for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, David Holliday, said the committee had asked the C.I.A. for a report on the case. Several committee members said they favored a more extensive investigation that could involve closed hearings.

Committee members said they were not satisfied with a C.I.A. briefing on the matter Tuesday. They said the C.I.A. had agreed to continue the briefing at a later date. Members want to know whether Mr. Yurchenko's debriefing had been mishandled and why he was allowed to dine near the Soviet Embassy accompanied by a lone C.I.A. officer.

Last month, the committee's chairman, Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, said he expected the panel to issue a report on the case of Edward Lee Howard, a former C.I.A. officer identified by Mr. Yurchenko as a source for Soviet intelligence.

Administration officials believe that Mr. Howard, who has fled the United States, helped the Soviet authorities identify and arrest A. G. Tolkachev, a Russian working for American intelligence.

Mr. Durenberger said in a recent interview that William J. Casey, Director of Central Intelligence, had balked at answering the committee's questions in the case. Senate sources said today that the C.I.A. had now begun to respond to inquiries, but that key questions remained unanswered.

Mr. Yurchenko said Monday during his news conference that at one point he

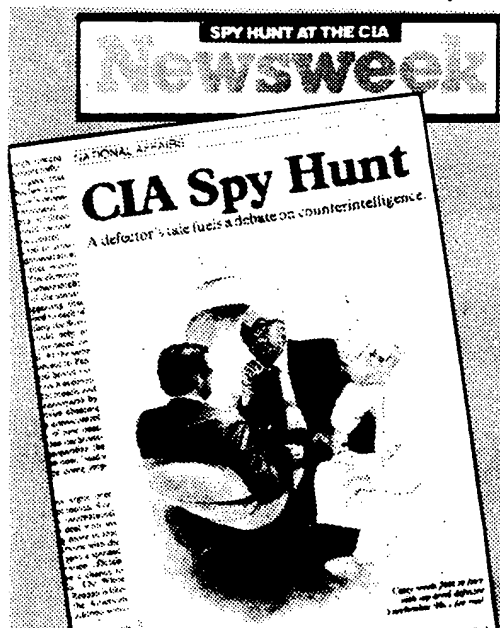
had been taken in a drugged condition to Mr. Casey's seventh floor office at C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Va.

"I was in a condition obviously that was the point of the strongest effect of the drug that when Mr. Casey entered the office I at first did not recognize him," Mr. Yurchenko said. "I rose, greeted him and later we went to Mr. Casey's dining room and had dinner in his dining room."

President Reagan, in speaking with the reporters today, said negotiations were under way with the Soviet Union and its European allies to reduce the number of their diplomats in the United States.

An amendment passed by Congress this year requires that the number of diplomats from the Soviet Union and the United States in each other's capitals be made equal in 1986. The Russians now have more diplomats in Washington than there are American diplomats in Moscow.

Senator Patrick J. Leahy, a Vermont Republican who was one of the sponsors of the amendment, has said the State Department is trying to sabotage the amendment by seeking to increase the number of American representatives in the Soviet Union. That was not the intent of the amendment, Senator Leahy has said.



Report on case of Vitaly Yurchenko is featured in Nov. 4 issue of Newsweek, including a picture of the K.G.B. officer talking with William J. Casey, director of Central Intelligence. Mr. Yurchenko has been focus of frequent news coverage since his defection was reported.